

IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 7, 2000

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Abstinence Efforts Will Continue, With or Without Administration Support

Washington, D.C. -- Congressman Ernest Istook (R-OK) says he and the Congress will keep pushing to promote abstinence among teens, despite lack of support in the Administration's new budget. The Administration's lack of support was criticized by Istook in a letter today to Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The Administration's budget released today proposes that Title XX (Adolescent Family Life) funding be cut by \$11-million rather than increased by \$20-million as Congress had directed, an increase targeted at programs to promote abstinence. Instead, the Administration proposes a \$35-million increase in its Title X programs, which promote so-called "safe sex"—a 15% increase.

Last year, Istook successfully offered an amendment to the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill which would have increased abstinence funding by \$50 million. The Senate reduced that figure to a \$20 million increase. The bill eventually signed into law contained the \$20-million increase, and stated that organizations could start applying now for funds to be made available in October.

The administration's cuts in Title XX will undermine abstinence training by preventing organizations from competing for the \$20 million in new grants this year.

Istook said he's surprised the Administration did not try also to gut the separate abstinence-promoting programs created as part of welfare reform legislation—but he noted that the Clinton budget doesn't propose even one additional penny for those programs, not even to adjust for inflation.

"President Clinton, Ms. Shalala and their allies on this issue still have the mindset that started in the 1960's—telling teens to use contraceptives rather than to wait until marriage. We've seen what that has done to our society and our values. Parents know that teens don't respond to mixed messages; government programs that focus on so-called 'safe sex' are still saying it's OK. We need to balance the so-called 'safe sex' message with the clearer message that abstinence is the only certain way to prevent teen pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases," said Istook. **"I'm disappointed that the Clinton administration has such a negative attitude toward abstinence. But their failure to care won't undermine our efforts in Congress to support abstinence as the best choice for teenagers."**

Dear Ms. Shalala:

I'm sure the American people would not agree with your budget proposal's negative attitude toward promoting abstinence. Despite Congress' clear action to expand programs that promote abstinence, you don't even approve an adjustment for inflation! Your budget proposal finds plenty of programs that you want to expand, including those promoting so-called "safe sex," but it's sad that you don't deem abstinence to be worthy of any further effort. I think your budget is a disgrace.

Most especially, your failure to budget for this should NOT be used as an excuse for your department not to pursue grant applications for the expansion of these efforts, which Congress has forward-funded. Please respond immediately if (and how) your department is dealing with or failing to deal with such applications.

Very Truly Yours,

